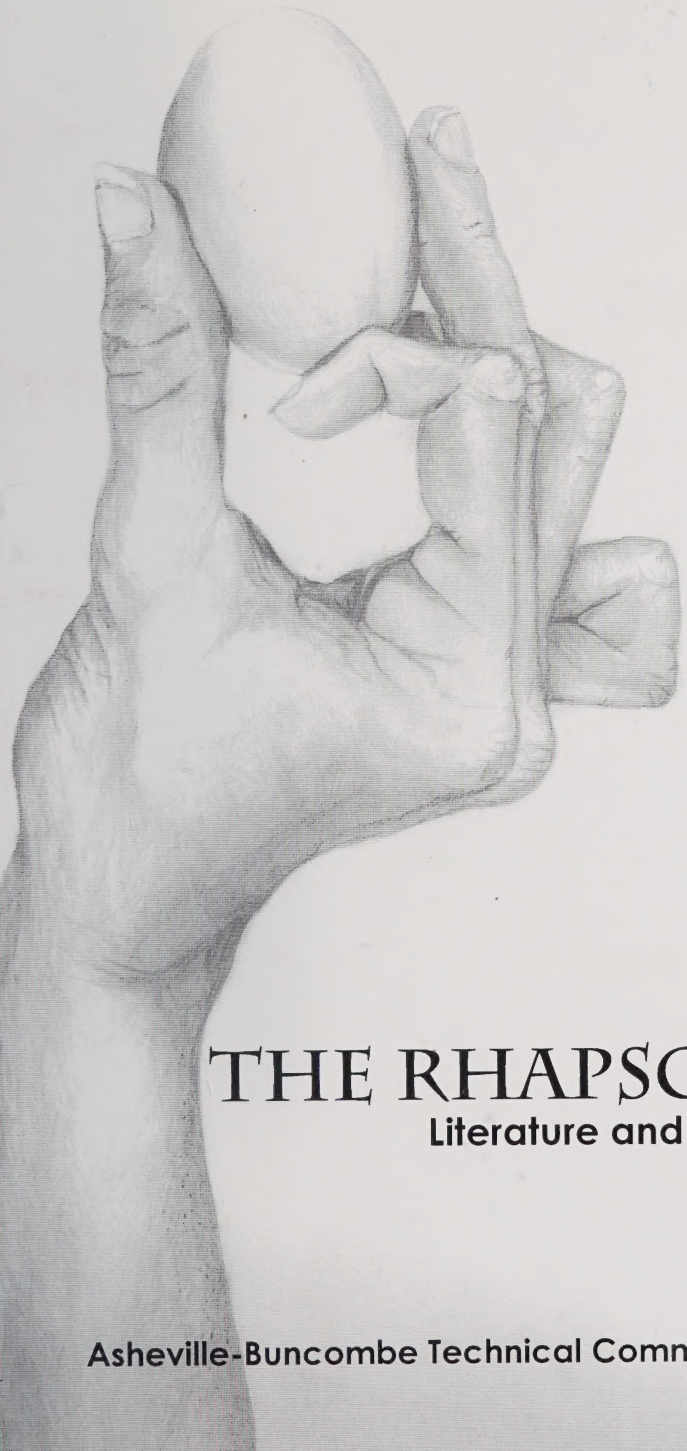

THE RHAPSODIST

Literature and Arts Journal

2014

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

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Technical Community College
Library
340 Victoria Road
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The Rhapsodist

Spring 2014

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, NC

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Editor's Note:

"There is a crack in everything God has made."

—R. W. Emerson

"Ring the bells that still can ring. Forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."

—Leonard Cohen

Dear Reader,

As A-B Tech's primary venue for literature and fine art, *The Rhapsodist* showcases some of the finest examples of creative expression from our college's diverse population. Thus, we are overjoyed this year to present our third annual issue, one filled with the fruit of both student and faculty labor. We thank all who submitted work, our team of generous faculty readers, and everyone who picks up this journal and begins reading for the sheer joy of the experience. The world may be tragic, as Emerson suggests above, but art certainly makes this tragedy bearable—and interesting. In the most felicitous scenario, art transfigures the world's "cracks" into portals of "light," alchemizes raw suffering into meaningful experience and fresh perspective. This is the real gift of the humanities and its practioners. This is the salubrious craft. *The Rhapsodist*'s editors thank you, reader, for supporting your peers and their artistic endeavors. Go ahead and ring the bells that still can ring...

Thank you for your support!

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Compensation." *Emerson's Prose and Poetry*. Eds. Joel Porte and Saundra Morris. New York: Norton, 2001. 143. Print.

Cohen, Leonard. "Anthem." *The Future*. Columbia, 1992. CD.

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rhapsodist, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /'rapsədəst/ , U.S. /'ræpsədəst/
Etymology: < rhapsody n. + -ist suffix. Compare French rhapsodiste ...

1. A collector of miscellaneous literary pieces. Now hist. and rare.

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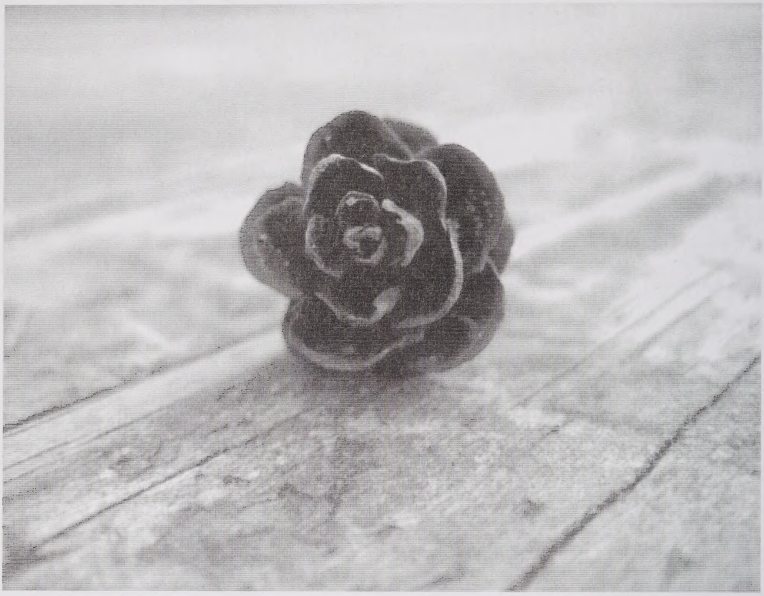
A-B Tech's Student Services Department

"rhapsodist." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 3rd ed. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, 2011.Web. 8 March 2012.



Fractal on a Cartesian Plane
by amie estes

She Has Dimples
by markia c. brooks

She has dimples
The one on the left is a little shallow
The one with the scar just above it
The one you stamp your thumb over
Tell her no one notices
And he has soft hair
Burgundy wine spilling off a kitchen island
Falling through your finger tips
They make Eskimos blush
Turning pressing eyebrows
Brushing left shoulders square
Free lips whisper secrets and songs
I can't swim
I can maybe stay
Winter beards chase naked necks
They fold and hide in homemade sweaters
Stubbled chins find soft skin like cat's tongue

Boy Scouts
by abigail hickman

I never intended to be a mother, so there's that. But it is especially surprising to find that, after 19 years attempting to fill the position, my children unanimously proclaim that my attempt has been a failure. While they are unanimous in their proclamation, they show deep variation in their intensity on the subject. The first born, and by all accounts, the one with the longest history to forgive, shows a measured diplomacy when discussing the sticky issue. "I can see that you tried pretty hard to be a good mom," she offers. This is meant as a balm to what she considers must be a substantial wound. To raise three children, or anyway, to make a serious attempt to raise three children only to discover a general feeling of disappointment at the results, might leave one with the feeling of a deep gash to some essential organ. And this may be the key, because I have long suspected that I may not contain the organ to begin with. Possibly something happened at the factory, but it seems incontrovertible that I lack whatever it is that mothers are meant to have. Empathy? Sympathy? I refer to it as Mother's Goo, the pasty, unformed substance that smooths the wrinkles of childhood and forms a cohesive bond between child and parent, and, later, child with the world at large. It was not in my tool belt.

I did not discover my deficiency until I toiled several years into the career. The first born was joined by her younger sister by then, and I was pregnant with the third. I was lost in the dog days of diapers and formula, picture books and scolding piles of laundry. I considered myself a machine, get up early, and perform the onslaught of jobs that littered my path until the next day when I would shuffle through the jobs again. I was the robot WALL-E but without his Barbara Streisand movie collection, or his whimsy. I remember squinting at the mirror one night and finding myself startled by the reflection. I was round with pregnancy but it was not my double chin that caused the alarm. For an eternal second, I glanced into my own eyes and among the fatigue and frustration I saw disenchantment. While I had solidly built my life on the belief I would become a fully realized princess, what I saw in the mirror that moment betrayed that belief and offered the concrete knowledge

that I was all Cinder and no Ella. I wandered into the nursery that night, looking at the girls asleep in their cribs. They were so pure just then, so unaffected by the magnitude of impurities that would be tossed at them through the years. I fussed with their blankets and resolved to teach them resilience. I was confident that while life may drag them down unsavory paths, cluttered with damaged people all directing them to their own bathroom mirrors one day, I would teach them how to withstand the journey. When they arrived, harassed and disheveled into middle age, they would be girded with knowledge that life is no fairytale. There could be no disenchantment if I taught them to suspect the enchantment in the first place. My personal thesis statement shifted that night. While I would remain loyal to the duties of Mother, I would filter these tasks through the lens of the Boy's Scout Motto. I would teach them to Be Prepared.

It's likely that at this point in the adventure, the moms with the internal mothering mechanism would have rejected that hypothesis as an assault on things soft and cuddly. Had I housed such a thing, it is likely alarm bells and buzzers would warn "Abort the Mission! Abort the Mission!" But my limbic system had long atrophied leaving me unwittingly vulnerable even as I perceived myself as impervious. My frontal cortex compensated the emotional vacancy. From that point forward I would rely on reason and logic to guide my children into adulthood. I pitied the mothers who protected their children by shielding them from the scary bits of life. "Those poor children," I would tsk tsk, "they will grow up to be soft in the brain." I felt fortified that night and maneuvered through the next fifteen years or so with an unwavering confidence that, guided by reason and solid sense, my children would grow into sharp-brained worthy contributors to a race that had, to my estimate, very few success stories.

My second born, now a young adult, loudly laments her childhood. "Other kids grew up with princess stories. You raised us on Elizabeth Smart." And I did. If a child was kidnapped, I'd hover over my children's beds telling them the circumstances and what to watch out for. When the child was recovered, we venerated the child's cleverness to outsmart her captor. "You taught us how

to leave trace evidence of our DNA in case of an abduction," my second born cries out to me. She means this as an indictment, but I receive it as an award. I trained them in all things realistic. Puppy dog eyes and playful pouty lips would never serve their cause. Only a logical rendering, a well-organized argument would cause me to entertain their point of view. I could be swayed with logic and words. Tears? Emotional appeals? Save those for the soft-brained. I had no use for them. And so my children limped through their childhood, housed in a physical poverty (by now Prince Charming had ridden off on our only reliable horse), but rich in discussion and meaning, I felt my children were prepared to take on the world.

Oh, there were numerous mistakes along the way, Turning our basement into a homeless shelter, offering unquestioned devotion to a religious cult, pushing my education into the "do it later" basket that already held the discarded garment of "find your self-esteem" among other ill-fitting articles. These were my failings. But I held proudly to my credo that my children would enter their adult lives skeptically prepared for anything.

My son, now sixteen voices his own discontent with my values. "When I was five, you told me Santa Claus was dead," He says with little emotion. Like my first born, he tends towards a cerebral search for answers. The second born, all wild emotion and helter-skelter passion was the most affected by my deliberate job description. It lacked fundamentals that met her necessities. She could never understand the comfort of cool logic, the satisfying pleasure of a cogent argument, preferring instead to be coddled by fanciful imagination. While I felt confident I was serving a balanced diet of reason and rationality, my second born felt rationed and malnourished for want of a spontaneous hug or some sort of playful make-believe. My son is waiting for a response to his Santa Claus comment. "I told you the truth of the man behind the myth, yes." I can offer no further solace because, beyond the purity of truth, I feel I have none to offer. But I do add, as a concessioned caveat, "The myth of Santa Claus, however, is a beautiful and necessary ideal." It's doubtful these three find much of anything beautiful in the way I carved out a place for them. But I feel certain that, one day, they will understand why I felt it was necessary.

Catching Smoke
by london atil

We had been doing this for centuries before you did.

Grey mustaches cap chapped red lips blowing white smoke
Into towers. Rising and expanding into cotton castles.

We still do it better than you.

We sit and wait, watching it develop into something worth wasting our breath.

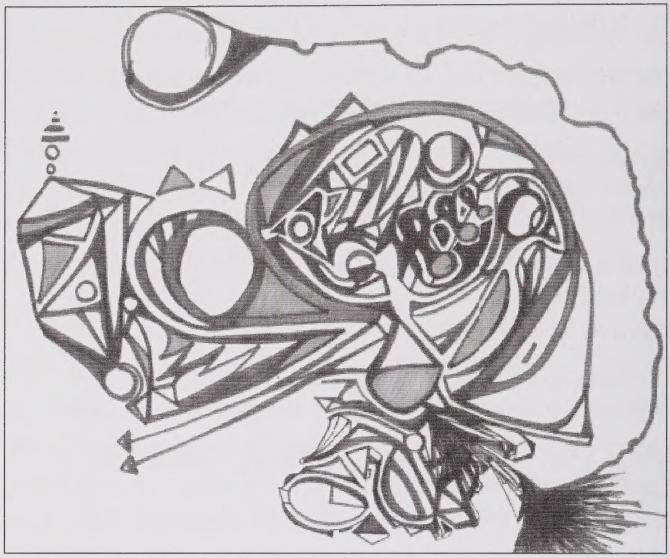
And we invest our time into it,
We are patient.

Hours pass to get that one ring that stops the room,
The ring that creates a silence,
Not a quiet,
A silence so complete that you can hear the ring rumble like a pocket thunderstorm.
A silence only broken when someone exhales and shatters it.

It writhes like a snake on fire,
Turning in every direction on a billion vertebrae
And vanishing sooner than it got there.

But it was worth it.

Your smoke is a waste.
You smoke like a paranoid, nervous person late for a meeting.
Gnawing on your poison filter like a pacifier you just can't put down.
Only exhaling in long thin plumes.
Your few rings are quick tricks to make girls ask
"How do you do that?"
But they don't mention your stink.
And that even in smoke, the thickness is what really counts.



A Fish, a Bird, a Sousaphone, and More
by david m. einzig

Fucking in a Tired Form
by reeves singleton

he sits on the bed's edge and opens his mouth
my fingers enter and play like worms in soil
gums glistening glimmering purple
the dog whines and kindly hides a bark
as the congregation concludes that the world is void
and sweat pools oceans that yellow their blanket

he smothers under the blanket
fabric and flesh crawl into his mouth
dust mites clog every void
building an angular home in soil
but skin lingers when it's worn down to the bark
like romans and their purple

one of his eyes bled purple
but the doctor patched it like the baby's blanket
he moaned when it happened, a bestial bark
escaped from throat and spewed from a broken mouth
he fell into childhood and was happy among root, leaf, and soil
resigned to life's happy void

maybe bliss can be seized from the gray void
colors rearranged and blurred into the king's purple
under nights flecked with clean stars like eggs in soil
the fire took all warmth when it lusted for our blanket
lovely teeth still betray life when coaxed from the mouth
and new trees grow with new bark

christmas day and they ate candy bark
then slept with gifts ripped from a far off void
booze splashed like new age bleach into every burnt mouth
companions' flesh worked into softness bloated and purple
every future stains the blanket
a new fruit conceived in sopping soil

abject limpness yearns to imitate wet and drying soil
and give soul to womb-bound bark
but that won't happen and the want forms tears under the blanket
no hunger arises for that warm and moist void
toes lose blood and swell purple
but he still has his beautiful mouth

eventually the soil fails and we are left with the void
and all we have is rough bark for our blanket
the last hiding place is the purple of our mouth

Childhood
by nez covington

Party outside, damp summer night, strands of lights and fuming outdoor ovens releasing smoke into dark woods. Kids run, barefoot and screaming, untamed, across a clearing; catch fireflies, watch them crawl, flashing urgently inside sweaty, clenched fists. I stand at mama's side, muffin crumbs on puckered mouth, staring at the ground. I watch another child squash a firefly between two fingers, and start to cry.

Backyard Ladies
by heidi kouri

Losing Patience
by grey lajoie

I think living in the belly of a whale has begun to take its toll on me. I woke up last night from a dream about a dog. I had forgotten about dogs until that dream. It was black, its hairs coarse and sleek and its teeth were immense and yellow. I was terrified. It came thrashing toward me, teeth first. You were sitting on the steps of a porch, in an underground neighborhood and you were wearing those glasses you always wore, and overalls, like when I was younger. You let me know it was okay for the dog to attack me, and so I let it. I was terrified but I saw your calm face. You pulled in a long drag of smoke and you gave me a dependable nod. And I let the dog's teeth into my flesh.

The minutes are awake down here and I'm beginning to forget what wrinkles look like. The air is grim and the walls are shriveled and slippery like the roof of my mouth, but I can't remember the creases on your face, or grandma's or grandpa's either. I can remember crow's feet, and furrows, because I liked the way they sounded, but I can't see them. I remember the television though. How the glow would capture my eyes. I remember going to visit grandma for the last time. I was three. I remember grandma's fluorescently lit eyes. They were blank apart from the sour residue hanging at her lids. And her eyes told us that too much time spent in that place could steal you from yourself. She sat watching a cooking show even though she hadn't cooked in decades. I remember her roommate too, a permanent look of terror ingrained on her face. She sat staring always straight ahead, clutching at her leg. I wanted to hug her, but I was scared of what might happen to me. Instead, I sat and I watched grandma try to eat cafeteria food. All I can see now is her eyes as they watched the television, lost and absent. They are icicles down my back even now in this hot belly.

I met a girl the other day. I wonder what you would have told me. I met her underneath the lungs of the whale, which we call, the Lungs of Unknown Whispers. She stood beneath the immense snoring organ. Down here, you see, we use the great fish's lungs to tell time. "Every ten minutes," they explained to us in school, "a whale comes up to breathe." It's all we have here. I entered the cavity and I saw the girl as she stood surrounded by ribs, watching the red balloon do its work, her turn to keep count. It would slowly diminish, like an ice cube in a glass, and she concentrated, as it collapsed, folded until it was only the size of a newborn child, and then, abruptly, the bag would swell, becoming colossal, seeming violent. But it would stop, just before reaching her face. She held a torch, its handle made of bone, its light would glow through the lungs when they were fully stretched. And I could see straight through them, could see the air that filled them, crisp blue air, I imagined. She was beautiful.

I could not speak to her. I wonder what you would have told me.

I feel I am always exhausted within these walls of flesh. I think it's the air; I am perpetually breathing in the adopted gasps of an ancient adventurer whale.

I have been in this belly for 157,784 whale breaths, and by my calculations, and assuming the teachers back home were right, that would make me twelve years old, which would mean it has been three years since I've seen you.

Three years.

I miss your voice, silvery and mellow. I remember how you would read me stories before bed, every night. And how you would tell me fun facts, like how most dust particles in a house are made from dead skin, and how Thomas Edison, the inventor of the light bulb, was afraid of the dark, and how the average person has over 1,400 dreams per year, or how the Blue Whale's heart is the size of a Volkswagen Beetle...

Most of all though, I remember the stories you would read me: *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Little Prince*, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. Your voice would melt the night. I can still feel your stubble tickle my cheeks, can still remember how your cigarettes smelled, can remember how you always kept a pencil behind one ear. And I can still see those crisp letters planted on white paper. Nothing down here is white, although I did find a piece of paper once, yellowing and crumpled, as if it had been laid in a coffee spill. I keep it under my pillow now, although I don't think anyone would steal it here. Anyway, it's blank. I remember visiting you at work too. You worked at the library, but not as a librarian. You were in charge of security, making sure no one stole the books. "The guardian of silent stories" you would call yourself, and I would giggle every time. You said that you wanted me to love reading because you loved reading. I miss books. I wish I could remember your face. I can hear your voice, but I can't remember how you spoke. Down here, words are tools. They are bald and tired like cranky infants.

I spoke to the girl for the first time yesterday.

"My name," she said, "is Patience."

She told me she was eleven years old, she figured. I explained that I, being twelve, was much older than her. She was in the room of the heart, which we call The Cardiac Organ of Missed Memories, and she was leaning against an embankment of muscle. Her dress was black with filth and stomach grease, but her hair was simple and shining. The thumping of the great heart was overwhelming. She smelled like cinnamon.

"I don't come here often," I told her.

"There's a music to it," she said softly.

"Do you think this is a good life?" I asked her.

A small crab stumbled on the floor of the off-balance whale, and picked at her heels. It was a muddy green, not red, like in movies.

"No." she said. "It is a lonely one." She looked up at me, her eyes seemed expectant.

The pounding of the heart was staggering.

"Did you know that a Blue Whale's heart is the size of a Volkswagen Beetle?" I asked.

"What is that?"

She is only eleven. I can not expect her to remember. She is too young to understand. I don't know what to say to her. I wonder what you would have told me.

There is certainly a music to this place, especially at night, when this mortal vessel cries out. It cries, I think, because it is lonely too. It's a deep, rumbling bellow that pulses through my body while I sleep. It is a beautiful and sad song. But there is no one in this ocean to hear it other than us. Maybe the creaky soul knows about us. Maybe it wants to sing us to sleep. Sometimes the others will howl along with the great mammal. I wish they wouldn't. I like to hear the mighty moan by itself. The rumble reminds me of the late-night car rides we would take back from visits to grandma. Sometimes, I can remember, it would be raining, and I would fall asleep in the backseat, to the sound of windshield wipers and voices on the radio, not singing, just speaking.

Yes, there is certainly a music to the whale. One day while walking through the stomach, I found a glass bottle. It says *Coca-Cola* on it, and when I blow into it, it makes music. I have a collection of found items from this belly. Among them I have: a wristwatch, broken, just like the one you wore, but filled with water, it has engraved on it, "HUGUENIN automatic"; a pair of gold, round-rimmed eyeglasses, with one of the lenses still intact which have written on them "FRAME FRANCE"; a tin plate which does not have anything written on it; a blue Lego block; and a small coin which says on it "BANK INDONESIA 10 SEN"; it is from 1954, and there is a picture of a bird on it. One of my favorite discoveries is a cutlass, like pirates used, although it is rusted enough that it's hard to tell what it is anymore.

Do you remember the day you gave me my library card? We were in your dim room, which did not have any shelves, but had books stacked in awkward heaps all around the floor and on tables and on your bed, and most of the books sat still open. When I looked at them, I could imagine each moment they were

left by you, mid-sentence, hearing the phone ring or a knock at the door. They were left open because, certain you would return in just a moment, you would not bother to find a piece of paper to mark your place. You handed me the little plastic rectangle and you told me that I was lucky, that in some countries, certain books were banned and that the people were blind. You extended the card to me, and I looked at your wrist, at your watch, and I asked you why your watch never worked. You said that you thought it was because your body had a high electrical field and that because of this your wrist would drain a watch battery within days, but you said that grandpa thought that was phooey. Do you remember? You unclasped the timepiece, slipped it off of your wrist and you handed it to me. You told me the duration of something isn't important, you said that how brightly something shines is what really matters.

I didn't understand what you meant because your watch wasn't shiny at all. I talked to the girl again, Patience, this time more prepared. We were in the hollow chamber of the liver, which we call The Liver of Lost Lives.

I approached her, "I found the carcass of a squid..." I said.

She looked at me, perplexed.

"I used the ink from his sack to write you a poem."

"What is a poem?" She asked.

"Just listen," I said, and I pulled out the crumpled yellow piece of paper.

Clouds of bruised blue waded against the black sea of sky,

And I thought maybe those clouds were sad old whales,

Letting specks of their tears fall into my hair

I have craved the rain, ached to float

Lost colors, blue and yellow and white

Live underwater and long to swim

Not until you could I float

And it was not until you that it snowed

I look at you and milky moonlight,

Vapors peeking through frosted glass

The crunch of paper beneath boots,

You were carved from ice and snow

And I from sleet and rain

We, the white blood cells

Of this dusty old being, floating through space

We have not floated in many years

She looked at me with eyes of mint. Only looked, for a long time, examined me and my pores and my freckles. Finally she spoke. She asked, "Will you walk with me through the two mile spine? Will you hold my hand beside the Kidney of Lust for Strangers? Will you kiss me inside the Stomach of Maybe We Shouldn't? Please just stand with me beneath this whale's great fluttering heart?"

This girl burns my mind with candlestick talk.

It is not all that different down here. For example, there is an algae that grows in the gutters of the stomach, and when I step through it with bare feet, it feels just like grass on my wiggling toes. There is a sort of fog that rolls through too, just like at the surface. It's a kind of purple mist, the color of melted wax, and it hangs in the air around my ears. We are missing a lot down here, of course. Like books, and clothes dryers, and stars. I miss the stars. We do have the moon though. I don't know if anyone else down here knows about it. Maybe I'll show it to Patience one night. When the whale sleeps, it drifts at the surface of the ocean, and at the right time, in the right spot, I can lay under its blowhole and the little circle of glowing light lays into me. And I am four again, and I am lying in the park at night again, with you.

Did you know that when a whale sleeps, it only rests half of its brain at a time? It's so that the other half can keep it afloat. That means the whale must have an extra set of dreams. Maybe it also has an extra set of thoughts, and an extra set of wants and fears too.

Here, we have no books, but we are not without words. Patience showed me. The words are in the whale's mouth, which has no name and which I had never before been in. The tongue was much harder than I imagined it would be, like a boulder. When I breathed, the air felt thick and sticky. It was massive, the mouth, the most immense space inside the whale. I could not see the ceiling, and when we spoke, our voices would reverberate into the shadows above and disappear.

Covering the pink cheeks, there were thousands of words, messages written in jagged, chalky lettering made of white scar tissue. Others had come not knowing what to say, and so they

simply carved out their thoughts in tattoos. The whale could not speak, but his mouth was full of words, full of thoughts.

Thoughts like:

"I miss my mom."

"Where am I?"

"How do I get home?"

"It's dark."

"I'm scared."

"I don't want to die."

I imagine their words would bleed when they were first written. Some words would cut deeper than others, words like "miss" and "die" would pierce deepest, reaching muscle, and blood would stream down from those, the saddest thoughts in long thin lines of red, like the giant bars of a baby's crib. And then eventually the bright red bars would fade into smoky white and become more like memories. Maybe it's easier to tell the truth in the dark. Patience showed me hers. A drawing, the image of a bird without wings carved into the pink skin. She touched the soft, ruined place with her palm and I liked the way she looked at it.

Earlier today, I was reminded of something else from back home, trees. The spine of this colossus has built up thick layers of brown crust and it looked just like the bark on an overturned tree from our back yard. I was with Patience and we gazed at it. I carved our initials into the dusty old spine, the same way the words are etched into my wristwatch and glasses. Just like a tree, I could make out layers, rings, which spoke for decades. And for a moment, a tremor stirred under our feet and within the walls, and I tried not to cut too deep so not to hurt the fragile giant. Bone dust sat in small piles like flurries around my feet, and the very small pieces of our whale worked their way into the wrinkles in my palms, into my fingerprints, my identity. After that, she and I walked for a long time through that tunnel of bone, in silence for the most part. Occasionally she would catch me staring at her, and she would ask "What are you staring at?" And with too much quickness I would say, "Nothing."

When we reached the end of the spine passageway, some of the others stood there, the ones who howl at the whale. Being that they are thirteen, the others are all much older than me. They are called, Hodges, Royce, Orval, Bjorn, Jonah, Thinker, Aldo, Kermit, Roosevelt and Jeff. And I hate all of them. Especially Jeff. Each time we pass his eyes look at me with either hatred or fear. I am different, I know and so do they. Patience went up to speak to him when she noticed, and she spoke too

softly for me to hear, but when she returned she looked heavy in the heart and she did not ask what I was looking at for the rest of the day, and so I looked at my feet. And when I asked what was the matter she too quickly said nothing. And I do not understand what has happened. What would you have said about this, I wonder.

I returned to her, late that night, and I demanded that she explain herself at once, please and thank you.

This is what she said to me: "I am sorry, my friend, my playmate, my companion. Why do you look at me in that way? Do you not understand, my boy, my flame? I do not want you, my other. You are not for me, you dolt, you waste, you apple of my eye. My dearest lover, you disgust me. I want nothing to do with you, my love, my heart, mi amour. Go away forever, you despicable boy. Love of my life, you know nothing."

I have decided that I know nothing.

I think I am finally losing my mind in the guts of this creature. Last night, I could swear I heard the whale speak to me while I lay trying to fall asleep. Its voice did not sound large, as a whale's voice should, rather it sounded old, like grandma when she's thirsty. It said, I think but I'm not sure, "Others have ears but hear not." I've been trying to understand. It feels so familiar. Sometimes I feel very old, and I wonder if perhaps I haven't already lived my life, and if now I'm not just in some strange afterlife, full of half-digested muck and children. But sometimes I like to imagine that we belong to the whale, that we are all just the dreams and memories of this whale, wandering around inside of it. Like cartoons rooted to a thought bubble. I think this could be true, because I can navigate this belly with my eyes closed. In complete darkness, I know where old bones will creak under my feet like wooden floor boards. Maybe I belong here.

As I fell asleep I thought I heard a groaning foghorn outside, and birds. I sat with my ear to the warm inner skin all night but all I heard was crashing waves.

How old is old? What deepens the graves under our eyes and in our forehead? Am I old yet? I know grandpa was old, because sometimes I would tell him fun facts that I learned from you, like; "The olfactory nerve, which in charge of our sense of smell, has a pathway right through the amygdala, which has to do with emotional memories, and so maybe that's why grandma's perfume makes you cry?" but when I spoke to him, he would only point to his ear, shake his head and look sorry. You told me he was deaf because he had already heard the loudest things in the world, and he couldn't bear to hear any more things. And grandma said that he had forgotten about the war, but that his heart remembered. I asked which war and she said, "the big one."

I think not having anyone to hear her say "I love you" must have been what made grandma so tired.

Even though your voice would glow when you spoke about grandpa, I didn't like to be around him. He would look at me with sad, remembering eyes, and it would make me sad too. I saw once that he had a tattoo. I noticed it while he put on his socks in the morning. It was on the bottom of his crooked foot. In bold letters, in ink the color of the blacks of his eyes, it said "AND STILL SUCH THINGS EXIST." You always told me that every word was important, so one day I asked you what grandpa's tattoo meant. You looked surprised, you said "Oh, you saw the bottoms of his feet?" but you spoke in a hesitant way and you didn't say anything after, so I didn't ask more questions. But after that I started thinking, maybe there's more under his other foot. If every word is important, why didn't you tell me what it is he steps on every day?

Before I opened my eyes this morning, I could swear I felt flies humming around me. I must have been mistaken, how could flies get down here? I woke with slug trail sweat drips on my back and I found myself breathing syllables like silent pleas. I dreamed last night of the strangest sounds. Only muddy colors and sounds, so clear. First, a scream, almost metallic in harshness. There was a gurgling noise, like someone choking on a glass of water. A trickling, eventually followed by a too thick liquid creeping around my skin. Something that sounded like a watermelon being split in half, or a tree about to collapse. Lastly, the moaning of the whale, booming, shaking my hairs out of place. All of the light came splintering in at once, electric white. Once the light softened I could see everything. The rafters of the whale, shattering as if disposable. Its skin falling away like crumpled origami. There was a white sludge like soggy tissue at my feet. Everyone was there. Patience stared at me the way grandpa always would. Her eyes were full of sorry, full of sadness and regret and remembering. She glanced at my chest, where my water-filled wristwatch was pinned like a badge. I could hear voices behind her, whimpering at me, "We just want you to leave us alone," and then a quick breath drawn in after. All of them gripped at bits of paper and wood, and then it was lifting them away, like a great kite of tissues. Except instead going up toward the sky it carried them all down, into the darkness of the sea and I caught sight of their eyes, terror forced, veins cracking, frantic grasps. Everything felt so pale, but the air was heavy with a tortured smell. What is most strange, I thought I saw you there, wearing a funny red cap, standing among a crowd of foreign sailors, rain falling from a great height. Frozen in panic, like a scar.

The Man, The Legend: Robert Franklin
by mark klepac

A Présent Beau for James Mercer Langston Hughes

by stephanie johnson

Hero's heart prose

Croons Harlem street songs

Taunts uncle Tom-Tom

Cultural repo man

Arouse soul color

Acetone sugar sours stars

Encourages hope

Unearths struggle and solemn scars

He rather utter laughter

Conjure mulatto temples

Paper armor Negroes

To contrast truth

As halogen heat

Rots meat

Once upon a trance

Postpone.

Letter-Grade to Self
by joseph jamison

Hang in there,
you casting cynicism
under fluorescent skies, over
molded plastic and lacquered desk.
Up-staging inspiration with
shadow puppet theatrics,
dancing over encouragement,
sparked imagination
and lit fires.
Hang in there.
Your hands will mold
Plato into irrelevance,
split apart Odysseus' journey,
balancing Homer's motives
with the worth of atoms.
You will trace origins,
with a better outline.
The bible becomes a book
and nothing more.
Hang in there.
Use clocks for mandalas.
Meditate on seconds,
ignore every minute.
Remember, time
only exists at deadlines.
Hand in every assignment.
Never mind forgetting
what you've learned.
History will repeat itself
for a better grade.

War Spit
by forrest mcdonald

Teeth break away, soft marble chips grinded out by each other

Losing the forever chromium

Glow of youth stained vessels

Teachers, students alike, white and black

Hanoi Jane shouting in red rebellion

Hand-in-hand stomping with impatience for an end

To the end that people are witnessing ages away

Marching behind friendly lines, friendly fire inevitable all

For the man dubbed Charlie

Draped in green as their prey, machines creep closer and closer

Hidden in an early afternoon foliage

War spit smeared over humid brow, jump from cover

General Ping saw his last sunrise from a hole in the ground

Through cracks in clay wrought bamboo mats covering his fox hole

Green Beret Macmiller saw his thirty fifth kill a few hours later

Fleshy boot heels testified to the lives taken

Ears swing from bracelets on the cold arms

Rosary's brought a sense of purpose

Purpose that was expelled

And shaped systematically, instinctively into the CAR 15 now slung over

Each machines back`s

Zippos are pampered, engraved echoing spoken words like "Why me"

"I`ll be home soon mama," with a fist clenched black

Six Months Saturated in Tired Brown Tea
by christina wozniak

Why Don't We Have Sax Anymore?
by anonymous

I understand that we've outgrown our "Hungry Eyes," those days when we were younger and more excitable, when the world was at our door in a series of half-steps. And a part of me knows we were just "Lost in Emotion," what with my eyeshadow undertones and your billowing, silk suit. Of course we were—we were practically kids! But I know you remember. The sax we used to have was not just noteworthy; it was alternately piercing, pulsing, and stroking, and I know you recall the flutter and moan.

"I wanna go back and do it all over, but I can't go back" and you can't go back, and so here we are, two reeds warped by time. Obviously, it's been a while since 7th period Jazz Ensemble, so this might come as a surprise. But I've thought about it, and here's what I propose: let's re-claim those vibrations. Let's strap on the old instrument and remember how to play. With some patience and imagination, I believe we can rekindle the kinds of people we were when we used to have sax.

First, though, let's be honest about it. We both need some solo time. It's perfectly natural, and neither one of us can keep score this time around, okay? You were right: anyone who tells you they don't take a few solos is a liar or plain nuts. It's part of how we all groove. If anything, that kind of fingering reminds you of "What You Need," right? It's okay to throw your head back and feel your own tune, especially since it adds to our harmony later on. Beginning now, I promise I will value "Your Latest Trick."

Now, this next pitch may seem off, but please hear me out. We might want to consider role-playing, you know, a little fantasy sax. Look, you can be Kenny; I'll be all things Sade. Or maybe we surprise each other—"Who Can It Be Now"?! ...Or, okay, if you're thinking, "I Can't Go For That (No Can Do)"... what about toys? Sometimes it just takes a little valve oil, you know? Maybe we treat ourselves to a couple of slings and thumb savers. Or—and I'll just throw this out there— blue velvet. Yeah, imagine opening up to that.

Look, it's been a long time, and "Modern Love" has no bridge to it, but at this point in our lives it's kind of like, "Urgent, urgent, emergency!" You know? So what do you say? Will you "Take Me Home Tonight?" ...Or what about right now? Because I mean it, I swear. I'll wet my reed right here. I'll close my eyes, and take a deep breath, and for the sake of sax everywhere—watch me: I'll blow.

Thank you, Sociology
by porscha orndorf

I was a sociologist before I understood how I got here. Kids from trailer parks don't end up with decent salaries, nice homes, and stable families. At least, that's what all the statistics say. I should be flipping burgers at a fast-food joint, juggling child-care, rent, and a myriad other bills from week to week – putting one debtor off to pay another, robbing Peter to pay Paul, as my Grammaw Lovie always said. All I knew growing up was that I had to get out of there. Poverty sucks. There are no two ways about it. Crawling out of it takes courage. But it takes a lot more than individual effort, and that's something I couldn't see until I became a sociologist.

It wasn't just my own determination that got me out of the pits of destitution. My own determination would have kept me there, bound by social forces beyond my control. But individual effort played some part – that can't be discounted. It doesn't take a sociologist to see how individual effort works in someone's favor, though. It takes a sociologist to see how social forces lined up in my favor – how I was carefully situated to be one of the few to climb out.

I'm white. That certainly helped. My life could have been much different if I were born Black or Hispanic. My chances of making it out of poverty would have been much lower. White people are given opportunities that Black people aren't far more often than Affirmative Action works in the favor of people of color. Without sociology, I wouldn't have known.

My trailer park was in a wealthy school district. It's not just any education that places a person ahead of their parents – it's a quality education. My high school was well-funded by my middle-class and upper middle-class neighbors. My parents rented our lot and paid for our trailer. Our property taxes were zero, so my schooling was paid for by someone else's property taxes – the parents of my wealthier classmates who wanted to ensure their children got ahead. I managed to piggyback on someone else's dreams for their children. Without sociology, I wouldn't have known.

I have Asperger's. My own nerdiness seems to be part of my existence on the autism spectrum. My youngest brother is dyslexic. His trajectory – same environment, same social forces – led him somewhere else. He's out of poverty, but only up to the working class. Even with a full-time job working in a furniture factory, he is always one paycheck away from being back in poverty. I've been able to save money because my salary is twice his annual wages. He can't save because his bills take all of what he earns. There's a vast difference between our abilities to prepare for our futures. Without sociology, I wouldn't have known.

There are only a few spaces in elite schools where an individual can secure a space that will put them far ahead of poverty. I wasn't going to secure one of those spaces. State-funded universities, like UNC Asheville (my alma mater), made higher education available to me. Community colleges, like A-B Tech, make higher

education even more affordable and accessible to those who are impoverished. Financial aid from the federal government makes higher education accessible and affordable for many. A government that once thought it was important for poor people to get an education set up systems to ensure that poor people had access to education. These are social forces that worked in my favor to ensure that I made it. Without sociology, I wouldn't have known. Without sociology, I would continue to praise myself. I would continue to believe what everyone else says about me: That I've worked hard to climb, that I should be proud of myself, and that I have no one to thank but myself. But I have a lot of others to thank. In fact, I have an entire social system to thank. This social system set me up for success, not failure, even though I started at the bottom. Others are set up for success far ahead of where I started. Others are set up for failure before they are even born.

But it's sociology that I really must thank. Sociology let me see how I got here. It also let me see the obstacles in my way. Without it, I wouldn't have continued my struggle. I may have stopped. I may have given up. But sociology was there. The sociological perspectives I gained through my studies showed me, clearly, where the obstacles were. Once I could see them, I was able to plot how to overcome them or make my way around them. And now, I teach Sociology. I do it because I want others to see the obstacles in front of them. Not their personal obstacles, but the ones placed there by the structure of society.

Acetylene Virgin
by seth grube

for Sylvia Plath

Is it only the words, your circumscribed song
spancelled by type,
and the pages so small to contain you;

was not some destiny at work that carried your discourse
over hills and across oceans
that I might lay claim to its visitation?

In life I can haunt the streets and countryside that filled your eye
opening themselves like a blossom into your emptiness,
and perhaps enter a similar moment, just before dawn
by stonewalls, apple trees, ghostly sheep
that you wrought into your craft for how it mutely disclosed its secret.

But what your body carried away,
the hasps embracing your soul,
are hidden and overgrown,
like molten metal gone cold and hardened into something
I can never find.

This book that lies open before me is strange and impersonal,
for its vocables stamped in print,
for its binding and the value that another will gain
when your voice
looses itself like a vire from the past,

somehow from a life still warm and aglow,
like the mouth of a hearth winking from mountainside windows
or a lantern far out at sea.

And I don't know how to explain in words
how the weight and the pain you carried
has arrived for me to ride like some cargo of hope,

or how I might tell you that I wish to free what you've written
from all the pages closed on darkness,

and sing them from some cold and lonely height,
so that you might reclaim them
warm with my breath,
somewhere in the wind.

Memory: Wedding Photo
by joseph jamison

A family's branches grown thicker than roots, seasonally pruned back to perfection.

I appear within frame, misplaced, closer to the ground than ever to them,
steps away from the aunts, fathers and grandparents posed around the hollow pulpit.
Your brother, the chapel's darkest ram, grazing in graveyards surrounded by decaying memory.

Inside the womb, our mother's blood bonds us. All else is August ice.

I remember standing next to him, your father, before the stained glass altar,
like a step-father's blood covered in iconoclast mirrors.
Broken images becoming shards,
crimson mosaic floor tiles, scattered about our home leaving you without room to play.

You hid at their wedding, veiled under white, the last bastion of your innocence.

Faces of these family members have faded, in this picture, in my mind.
You, my sister, half related by fate, tied to my eternity by grace.
Reflection of our mother epitomized, the only lives who mattered remain.

The Substance of Things
by nicholas welch

Three men entered town on horseback,
Chapped in conformed leather.
The halcyon was fresh and
faint veins of blue frost had appeared on the roof of the saloon.
Something pulsed in that particular darkness, most alien to the incognizant being.

No one stared. No one stopped—a single boy
asked his mother if he was real. A train whistle blew shrilly,
like the heart-squeezing stroke of midnight.
They hitched the horses, the second and last men
leaving their guns in horse-slung holsters.

They embraced each other as would brothers, and then began their final journeys.

The first entered the saloon with a brazen, horse-mounted gait, and sat—
One bourbon,
down like burning Byzantine fire.
A heavily suppressed admission of inexperience adamantly kept in his throat.
His eyes drifted and suddenly settled, with intent. Modestly pale, kind, a daunting profundity:
a concise connection made his heart
nearly burst mid-flight, surpassing an unwritten capacitance he had, perhaps, previously perceived.
Later, he spent the night in a room upstairs, wondering
if he went unnoticed—if he could, by small degrees, know the feeling more definitively.
'A hope and a future' echoed somewhere in the numb ecstasy of his mind.

The other two men went to the washroom, to cleanse
the dust, muck, and filth from their bodies.
The second whistled and, when he stepped from the water,
he shaved and cut long locks of matted hair. He bid the last man a kind farewell,
and went just outside of town, resolutely,
to collect Ophelia's violets—
later, appearing on a doorstep.

The last man smiled.
He walked down by the river, watching its gentle current—
walking with it,
toward home.

Purple wildflowers drifted beneath his steps, dampening

like mercifully dabbed pastel in the mist of snow that had quietly begun.

Dark petals melted against water which was ever impeding its own regathering.

The last man knocked twice and waited.
Opening the door, he saw the familiar stead.
The hearth where he felt his fire had always burned,
even when it knew assurance not.
The only furniture left was skeletal.
Coarse burlap cream still sheltered the windows.

He built up a small pyre of kindling and felt for his matchbook.
He laughed, suddenly: remembering. Striking the match, it fizzled and crackled and he nursed it under the wood with patience.

The last cowboy sat down in an old arm chair in front of the fire.
In his sleep, he met her,
in fields of sienna and lavender.
Roses were pinned in her raven hair.

Coexistence
by cecilia stokes

Desk Revisited
by adam carnes

The tendrils of root and vine spread vivaciously through the motherboard, up towards faded LCD and scratches of memories stored, yet lost to lack of power and sophisticated stamina,

Lost too the animals of late.

A mirror-cracked smorgasbord patterned a ritual caps lock and arthritic tick, gave a game, and showed a wheel, spread chance, luck, and hope. Theirs would be none of that.

Scorn at scorched decisions latent in buy offs, all the payout's, the least of which, neither, is burdensome now. Here.

Then, Yes.

Oh, god yes, but here.

No.

All is nature and reversion is exponentially fashioned to be not only taking its course, but also altering it so unnaturally.

The desk I once spent those hours' tediously compensated minutes copying; pasting folders and files, and renaming Lynda's pictures because she could never even figure it out,

Always with more, more, and more detail.

Serene some 25 years later, no has it been that long.

30 years later.

The cobwebs creep down below the metal legs and swoops swooshes,

Swish switches back as satchels of the years' prey mummify in their midst.

Brushed away and feel the air shift, snuffing the steps of hard work.

I felt the spiders would have to do this through necessity as, do I, assuredly.

Years of hard work must draw near, as I am tired and want this to be where I left them.

After coming all this way it was time to find out.

The top drawer always stuck just a little. The slight nudge passed the 2/3 mark, the sweet spot.

Unless, as sometimes did happen, a pen or lighter, became wedged behind the right rear wheel, the wood had rotted, black and orange with rolling shadowers,

And there!

Shit.

It was a lighter behind that wheel, yellow and faded. 30 years. Could it light the flares to lead the rest of us out?

Flick. Flick. Constant check of chipping flint for just a glimpse of faulty maps and corridors adorned with dust and "In the beginnings,"

Flourished cornucopia like bacterial indulgence swept.

The corrosion left this warehouse, a place where sundries, covered roofs, evictions counting them all one by one;

Lever rusted with autumn dust, pointed stars sleep steep tales of pass it on.

Moreover, there was a crumpled piece of paper,

Unrumpled corners crept the light in cascading imagery ink read with an odor of ceremony.

The Conflagration
by magnolia wilson

Chain smoking, fireside
A drunkard with metal eyes reads my palm, intersects life and heart
The grinding voice tells me I'll bear no children, die young
Declining prophetic advances, I light another grand idea

Because ignorance is not the same thing as amnesia

Machine whir fades to gentle murmur as I violently shake soot from my ears
Hurling up the stairs, I spit blood onto the concrete
Feels like being led astray, tripping on an overflowing ashtray
Gleaming out the kitchen window, you stand red hot

Because I don't need to tell you what longing is

You've a cast iron heart, stoked and persistent
I've a hole in my head, filled with feathers and swill
You rise and sparks ignite, become engulfed in light
I stand, weary muscles indenting dark earth, and cast a shadow

Because brave can merely mean getting out of bed

Perched over you, your tendons between my teeth
You tell me I smell like a dog
And I howl from your slash-and-burn
As you wipe ashes from my eyes

Because it's not raining unless it's felt on the top of your head
and you're not real unless seen by the tips of my fingers

Unrefined, absent mind synapse back into place
Blood thickens, the tourniquet tightens, even my marrow is laconic
I grasp at soil, choking on your smoke, yet still crooning for your heat
Then you smolder over to me, I flash my sharp canines, and together we rise

Because the most we can offer is a brilliant conflagration

Etgar Keret's Heaven
by mary topper

When the lights passed through the windows from outside they made odd geometric shapes on the floor and caused the bits of mica in the dirt smears to sparkle. The light would come in as a box and run on the floor in the opposite direction of the bus, where it would seep over the thresholds and ridged lines in the aisle. Sometimes it splashed quickly over the floor and slid along the dangling legs of the other passengers and other times, like when we were turning, it would crawl halfway up the steps of the back door and get itself wedged into a crevice that hadn't seen light in months before we turned too far and it was cut off from where it came from. Then it was dark again.

I liked thinking that every box of light that came in was washing something bad off of me if it hit me on my shoulders or my neck. In my face it was blinding so I kept my head down just in case. But when the computerized female voice of the bus announced College Street, I needed to quit bathing in filtered sun and get off the bus. The bus is not a good place to bathe.

Sometimes the city would give me a new alley or street to explore, but this hadn't happened in a long time, because I had been there too long. In the beginning, I would catch a wrong bus, or get lost, or disembark from sun-bathing and half-sleeping too early and would be several appointed stops away from where I was supposed to be. Then my legs became chemical and I would find my way to work, but not before eating up whatever it was the city wanted me to see. It used to a building, or a quaint street, or a new bar or maybe even a little shop.

Now that I know most of it though, the city re-hashes things like it's trying to prove a point. It's too cold out to miss the bus and since I know the bus too well and too intimately, I won't miss it. I can't force myself to miss it, even. Not that where I'm going is very interesting. It's just cut-and-dry now and if you're going to catch the bus there's no two ways about it. You catch it, or rather it catches you, and you go directly to a place you saw before because the city has already revealed everything it can to you and there's no more to see.

The city acts, now, the way I imagine needy spouses do. It shows me College again and again and again and tries to remind me of when I first got here and what was uplifting and what was moving and what made me keep going. And needy spouses think that if they bring up the same stuff that you'll care again the way you used to, like in that deep way that people do initially. And I do care and I see the significance, you stupid place, but my chest won't flutter the way it used to because it can't do that for you anymore.

When I got to College I went where I always go, the city being careful to make sure the sidewalk looked the way it always did (or at least the way it most often did), and the sun had started to leak to the other side of the world. The people were funny shadows and a few of them had sparks in their chests which made them okay to talk to, but not in depth. The buildings and the Vance monument tried like they always do to tell me stories without words about how big things really are and how beautiful things are going to be if you just be patient and think like an idealist. I ignored them and went to my bar, wondering how they didn't get tired of giving me the same crap every time I was down here.

I sat down and ordered myself a beer and talked to Tammy for a long time about nothing. Beer used to taste shiny and forbidden and disobedient, and it still tastes that way except now I'm used to it. Another couple sitting at one of the tables across the room ordered some fries and Tammy walked quickly to the little kitchen, past the rows of bottles lit by tiny LED lights, where the greased smell of bar fare wafted up the counter.

I thought about homework and work. I drank my beer quickly so that it became a nothing in the grand scheme of things and I believe that pissed off the city because it wanted to matter. Tammy and I talked a bit more – the snow, the school closings, not being able to get into the driveway in her car – and I nodded and nodded and agreed and agreed. The APD is ridiculous, do you really have to go through all that just to run this place? Why does the city even pay these creeps? No, I must have missed the guy who came in with a knife, which is too bad because I would have paid money to see the foray that must have followed.

The couple from across the room kept asking Tammy about where they ought to go since the Arcade closed and she and I thought it over and the best suggestion was City Billiards, because they at least had pool. I thought about Bier Garden and their air hockey table much later when it was too late to say anything, but the city would tell them about it eventually in another way and maybe they'd like it, so it didn't matter that I hadn't thought of it at the time.

The sun drained away and the city got moody because I wasn't giving it the attention it wanted. It got dark and the people and their shadows weren't sparking at all, or at least if they were I couldn't see it. My homework poked me in my frontal lobe and my bed piped up too. Then the cat put in his two cents and reminded me he would really like something to eat. So while I was distracted by responsibilities, the city did what it does sometimes: something desperate, out of nowhere, to give me a little shake. Tammy's iPod began to play a pretty song over the speakers that sang to me about a different time when I was little and had little daydreams that were actually very big for someone of my stature.

Before I could glare out the windows across the street and ask if this was really the best this place could do, the music filled me up and made me big and it hurt, and I told Tammy how much I loved it here, and gave her a big tip. She told me she was very happy to have seen me. I thought about you, and the song got to its familiar crescendo toward the end, and even though it was familiar it felt new and promising all over again. The city knows how to get me, I know, and when I walked out the lights looked warm and smug and people's chests were lit up with their souls and I thought about being held, and all the important things I needed to do tomorrow that might lead somewhere bigger later on. I went to the transit station to catch the bus home and watch the streetlights swish around the aisles. The city got off my back for the night.

Interim
by forest beaudet

i'm worried
with time
passing
        so
            quickly
these days, i've barely a moment to breathe

ivory towers burst into spray
as wind strums lakewater
there's not much else:
we laugh, and it's quiet
we speak, and grow loud

tell me about that Soul again
honey,
you've such a lovely voice

To Whom It May Concern

by grey lajoie

To Whom It May Concern:
I have chosen to retire from the business
Of fathering artificial trees.
The scent of the molded plastic
Sticks to my clothing and to my skin
Even after a long bath.
And women have begun to regard me
With looks of disgust
When I pass them in confined spaces
Airplanes, bathrooms, grocery store aisles,
Etcetera

My Reasons Are As Follows:
At night, when I'm alone in the factory
I can hear praying.
And I think of the cool green skin
Of a child's army man,
Heroic figurine, burned down
For my rubbery leaves.
And through the hissing and popping
I make out something silent, hanging
From his melting lips rubbing together
As tiny plastic arms outstretch
Like paranoid plant stems.

I am getting better at reading his lips
But it can be unsettling
Looking into his little placebo eyes

Until he is frantic and faceless.

Type A
by meru

Silence
by jennifer lynn browning

Bound tongues.
Different silences held by the barbed wire of braces,
the granite of stiff upper lips,
the earthquakes of crying tremors.
A chorus of silence,
each with its own timbre.

First silence stands up
her body enrapt in golden clothes
face elegantly painted and primed
form graceful and charming.
She waits for a free scream,
an uninhibited moment
when decorum can be set aside and
passion fear joy grief
can burst forth,
volcanic emoting of the fires within.

Another silence.
His beard frosted by the coldness
of his thoughts.
Looks
on heartache on tempests on despair and hungers
to let loose cries trapped,
cries forbidden his masculine exterior,
reserved
for times before "big boys don't cry."

One more joins the chorus.
Her tongue bound by her own belief
that hers is not
enough, not
profound witty smart gifted
enough to see
the light which shines all around her.
Hers is the silence of emptiness and doom,
a prisoner of self,
most fiercely guarded of all,
never paroled, but censored and beaten,

before any good deed can make recompense.

Ancestral
by caroline padgett

Strapped to the pole
bare breasted
wide eyes trembling,
begging for quick release
no one grants Her.

This Crucifixion
is never glorified.

Her back split open
Flesh torn, pink and oozing
the white bone visible.

Underneath the first tear of skin
We are all the same color.

The small white bar of soap,
an attempt to find dignity,
lay in the brown dirt below Her,
too far away for any hope
to reach.

Driven mad by his craving,
to devour the innocent and good,
He carves hate
so deep inside, it reaches
beyond Her life

where Her great-great- Grandchildren
still search for release
in tears she could not shed.

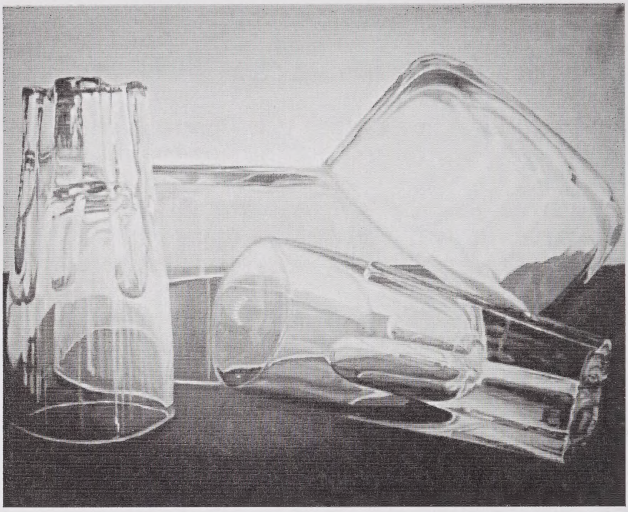
Countenance
by magnolia wilson

Months earlier a black dog drug his sticky pulp face across wood planks
Circulating around the room nervelessly, he shook red stains onto my pink blankets
Sinew and mandible exposed, the expression "hangdog look" had bled new meaning
My mother's face plastered panic, assessing the wildcat's action, while the dog hid

Months later I'd push a three-year-old's face into the dirt
Endless tongue slapping babble will lead to this compulsion
That, and the importance of feeling strong without ability of being strong
My mother's lips hid a smirk, watching her wildchild's silent repose

Now, I am enclosed within this supple frame, looking only at you with eyes not just craving your nourishment, but also your nurture
Between faces stapled shut, tissue and veins weaving to mend and faces gaping open, anticipating the taste of rich earth

Her face smiles
during a moment when we were both friends



Untitled
by joanna maldonado

Autumnal
by nez covington

I am a raw lump in my father's arms,
His tense back facing the camera,
My swollen face barely clearing his shoulder.
I, wearing stiff blue pajamas that my weeks-old body
Has only just begun to learn how to live in.

The background around us blurs with watery autumn light.
The garden stretches behind us,
A deadened winter brown.
I can still smell leaves and winter wheat,
Dry, dead, cracked and curled in upon themselves,
Waiting for the cover of snow.

My father and I in sharp focus
Cool and clear with the warm old light of our faces,
Like putting ice cubes in hot tea.
A mixture of syrupy warm
Punctured with sharp freeze.

My face, emerging from a doughy white hat,
Wrinkled with newness.
Cheeks bulging, seared and orange.
My eyes, swollen and fleshy, are the same deep, clear, blue-black
As my father's.
My small wet lips are forming a soundless O,
Surprised by this sudden introduction to the world.

My father's face turns sideways,
Looking down into mine.
His expression is of incredible focus,
Stern concentration.
The corners of his eyes wrinkle with age.

I still remember how it felt
To run my fingers through his length of soft, thin hair.
His wiry beard then a deep October red
But now, mostly white.
In the photograph I can even see
The strange little crease in his earlobe that he's always had.

He is wearing a worn-out flannel shirt,
Black and white checkered, flecked with bleach, lived in.
My favorite shirt he has.
It smells of him, like cedar and sawdust,
Walnut and old leaves,
Stored up winter sheets, just pulled out of the cabinet for fall.

I will learn to walk for the first time
In the spot that my father is standing.

He will teach me how to throw a baseball
High up into raw autumn branches of the walnut tree,
Knocking down fat ripe walnuts and smashing them open
Letting them stain our hands.
Later still, I will walk over this spot, away from the house,
Carrying a battered airplane bag
And he will watch me from the porch.

The time ahead of us is in flux, expansive and bulging with every possible future,
A drop of hot wax yet to be cooled and hardened into shape,
Into small droplets of memories.
The past is gone,

But I remember how my father smells.

I Know Fellas (A Man's Reply to Mary Lambert's "Body Love")
by nicholas gage garavaglia

i know fellas fighting so hard to be the tough guy,
like John Bender in Breakfast Club.

i know fellas who are muscle fit, Polo Ralph Lauren, and performance enhancing drugs.
there's guys who question if they are 'buff' and Calvin Klien-esque enough.

i know fellas flying planes into the temple of their body, pulling the trigger on their health.
trying to appease the father voice in their head, still screaming at them over a lost little league game.
no one tells little boys that one day they will be expected to look like superman,
held hostage by a cartoon.
it's difficult to accept that we may never look like the front cover of a GQ mag,
our entire generation of guys afraid to be themselves.
what are we to do then?

Wasn't it Fred Douglass who preached the simplicity of growing strong children as opposed to fixing broken men?
we insist on digging our own graves for the shoulder workout because women love strong shoulders.
we are playing with fire every time we take those "supplements",
trust me, i know how to stand in the locker room with pills and syringes.

i know the feeling but quitting will save you.
you don't have to go to war and kill and not cry,
and drive fast, and claim emotionless sexual conquests.
there are other ways to feel than opening your skin.

I know how the demons rage sometimes,
their quarrels spill out through the slits you have provided them.
your body was not meant to run on chemicals just as a car is not meant to run on Gatorade.
sacrifice your life to say "this is what being a man means."
fighting so hard for father's approval or a woman's affection.
tell us that our value as people is determined by our salaries or our muscle mass.

Are. We. Man. Enough. Yet?
stop. put your fingers to your neck, feel your arteries.
shave your face the way grandpa taught you, watch the whiskers dance as they circle the drain.
trace the edge of your jaw with the back of your hand. smooth as the day your mother first fell in love with your cheeks.
your body is breathtakingly complex and self sufficient.

you don't have to exploit it in order to prove anything. no, dad, no.
lean close to the mirror and look into your eyes, twisting, swirling color.

i once picked up a cracked river stone.
one side was smooth but the other was jagged and broken. I wonder what it's like to feel whole again.

i feel a river raging from my scars, the thunder of it is the most powerful thing i've ever heard...
love yourself in all your forms, speak encouragement to little brother, keep his head up.
know you are more important than your bench press max, more valuable than whatever expensive car you drive.

the women you hold company with do not determine your worth, your standing among other men.
your masculinity is determined by your character,
by fighting the river current until you are entirely smooth on every side again.
complete.

First Light
by joseph jamison

Lucas' alarm idled on top of the otherwise unadorned and unfinished pinewood table beside his bed. Set to the survival songs of birds, alerting peers that they had made it through yet another unsure night, Lucas' alarm celebrated every morning. Even through winter's late dawn, his life hibernated until the sun finally rose. Inside Lucas' customized clock, Rossini waited patiently to begin his alarming overture with incandescent accompaniment. One half-dozen, thirty watt bulbs donned the top of this handmade device to back-up any potential audio malfunctions. They ensured Lucas' timely arousal. After the symphony received their cue from the sun that morning, Lucas happily abandoned his unblemished eggshell tinted comforter to the strings of William Tell's prelude, 'Dawn.' Before making his bed, Lucas glanced out the bedroom window. He noticed the sun's radiant morning display was somewhat muted in the background by distant, overcast skies. "No matter," he spoke to the glass, turning abruptly to attend his first morning chore. He tucked each layer into place without a single wrinkle, as though it had never been touched, a showroom's precision. Lucas then unplugged the alarm clock as the symphony prepared to move into the second movement. As quickly as he had risen and completed his task, Lucas moved down to the ground and sat on top of the accenting grey yoga mat at the foot of his bed. The clouding shade of plastic rested unfurled, contrasting the rest of his pale, empty room. Faced east, he welcomed that morning as he had ever other, praying that the clouds would pass.

Lucas' routine began each morning inside the cramped bedroom. After the bed was made, he moved on to counted minutes of breathing exercises, followed by seven rounds of traditional sun salutations. As he stretched, Lucas' chest rose with each inhale. Through the exhales that followed, he imagined his breath moving the clouds out of the sun's view. To Lucas, yoga provided more than health or clarity for the day. His practice was a prayer to gods and his home was their temple. The well-lit, single-room bungalow was a palace built to please Ra and Apollo. Having designed the renovations for his bungalow, Lucas had carved no less than a dozen windows into each exterior vinyl-dressed wall of the small cube. Seemingly random mirrors adorned the remaining negative wall space, positioned with precision to reflect the sunlight in every season. The self-taught electrician composed a system of interior lights that could have lit the stage for any stadium concert, but it was perhaps his throne room which stood as his crowning accomplishment in illumination. Centralized, between the bedroom and open living room meets kitchen space, the bathroom was Lucas' only windowless room. The formerly ill-lit space traded unavailable natural light for the droning symphony of bulbs. Boasting six

fixtures that peered down from the ceiling and a bathroom mirror which spared only enough room on either side for an equal number of vanity lights, the room's blinding interrogation would have made it difficult for any other man to see which way his hair leaned. Lucas followed the Chinese zodiac. He was a rooster and his part was always down the middle.

Breakfast always came after prayer. Lucas preferred his eggs scrambled under fluorescence. His kitchen further brightened the dawn with the aroma of rosemary, thyme and basil, picked from the garden at dusk, the day before. Sautéing the herbs into eggs from his own coop, Lucas reveled in the fullness of sights and smells within his kitchen. Lost in the light, thinking about the wonders from his garden, Lucas forgot about the encroaching clouds outside. "What a gift," his mind repeated until the meal finished cooking. He considered himself to have more in common with these and all other plants than much else. Though he would have rather shared his company with longer days, the joy of apple season was enough to help him forgive the day's later starts. Lucas scraped the meal from his cast iron pan onto a ceramic plate, decorated in the traditional blue paint, inset on pristine china. The outlined image of a barred rock hen quickly disappeared under the steaming heap of fluffy eggs. Lucas sat down at his solitary breakfast nook, placing a red delicious precisely on its mark.

He considered breakfast one of his art forms. The crimson peel of September's fruit rested on top of stain-free tablecloths provided a focal-point for Lucas' eyes and his mind, which helped to quiet any unsolicited thoughts. "Delicious," was his mind's only welcomed mantra while eating. He believed when they said that, "The first meal was the most important." Eggs had to be eaten first, followed by fruit. Chewing each bite with intention, as if he owned the last chickens on Earth, Lucas scrapped away every crumb on the alabaster plate, exposing the blue chicken design once more. "Delicious." Before breaking into the apple's flesh, he lifted it to the window and compared it with the remaining sun. Nature's edible garnet melted into the burning hues of a low autumn glow. Ignoring the feigning light, focused only on the pending treat, Lucas closed his eyes and brought the treasure slowly towards his lips. "Delicious." The unobstructed aroma of waxless fruit always made Lucas salivate but that particular apple dripped with a lusciousness he had not yet tasted that season. The flood of juice rushed through the bite marks as though he had just released some natural dam. Each bite into the flesh further affirmed his suspicions that the apple was that season's best. As the birding clock above his window reached the warbler, chirping nine, Lucas gazed out the double-paned centerpiece of his kitchen, grateful for what he had before the peak of day. "Delicious."

Lucas digested some of his meal as he dressed into synthetic fabrics for his daily jog. Only after breakfast, could Lucas move outside and prepare himself for interaction. Lucas

grabbed running shoes from next to the door and moved to the porch to add the final piece of his uniform. Shoe tying was another form of meditation. He sat under the latticed roof and imagined himself already at the end of his run as he tied them. The last leg was his solace though he didn't mind the first few blocks, which were always silent. Lucas embraced this initial solitude, knowing he would soon after happen upon the Saturday children. When the weather was nice on weekends, the neighborhood kids always got together and played games in the street. After barreling past them, he would see Laura and her golden retriever. They lived on the other side of the neighborhood and ran the route opposite from Lucas. He had only spoken to her once, when the dog, Piper, barked at Lucas and surprised him to a halt. Lucas was often focused only on the thoughts of returning home and rarely allowed himself to become distracted that early in his day.

Next, Lucas would come across the few young couples who only socialized with each other. All of them had strollers, some even had two. For the last mile, Lucas took the quiet alley home. He found it necessary to run without interruption, not one wave or smile before returning home. The last leg was his solace. Lucas finished tying his shoes and walked down his chipped concrete steps towards the sidewalk, where he would begin the slow silent uphill. Even though Lucas had followed his routine perfectly this morning, he felt considerably sluggish moving through the arched that covered his walkway. He thought, perhaps, the extra weight of the apple had slowed him down. Regardless, he pushed himself down the road and began to feel better with each step as he cleared these thoughts from his mind, thinking only of the end.

After only a few blocks, Lucas' focus was jarred as he stumbled graciously over a break in the sidewalk. He looked back, unable to remember passing the crack the day before or any even before then. Confused, Lucas closed his eyes, filling his chest with the cooling air, trying to regain his composure and focus. As if echoing the crack's purpose, dissonant caws of nearby crows startled Lucas out of his concentration. "Rude," he muttered, thinking their repetitious calls were intended to mock his clumsiness. His embarrassment quickly became a scowl as he watched them peck indiscriminately at the well-manicured lawn across the street. To Lucas, the yard was immaculate and no place for the same scavengers who had destroyed his blueberry bushes that summer.

"Hey," he tried yelling at first, realizing his distance and neglected vocal chords were less than threatening to the invaders. After looking both ways, Lucas crossed the street as his head continued to move left and right down the quiet neighborhood drive. When he was close enough to the crows, immediately, his mind noticed the shade of his fear in their feathers. His heart knocked panic against his ribcage. Lucas quickly abandoned his attempt to deter the crows and hastily retreated back to his jogging path, alarm overtook his mind and caused him to ignore

an otherwise trepid method of crossing the street. Lucas was nearly safe on the other side of the street when his leg seized, causing him to pause as if some forceful hand had reached out to hold him in place. Overwhelmed by agony and fear, Lucas forgot to see the car that nearly struck him. The young driver slammed his brakes and car horn as if he wanted it to remain stuck. The abrasive duet of screeching brakes and blaring alarm forced Lucas' hands away from consoling his sore leg in order to cover his ears. Lucas stumbled away with apologetic eyes as the car sped away without any audible response. Gingerly, Lucas reached the sidewalk and leaned onto his knees. Fatigued, he ducked as the murder of crows abruptly left the ground and flew over him. Caution carried his gaze towards the sky as the flock silhouetted his shame. Lucas opened his eyes to the blocked sunlight, and took a series of deep breaths.

Normally, the abundant light of cloudless days seemed to invigorate Lucas as if he were gaining energy directly from the sun. Seeing himself more akin to plants, Lucas knew the current overcast skies would leave him feeling more exhausted than usual. Still, Lucas upheld a postal worker's ritualistic conviction and kept running. The normally lively street held a hollow stillness as the rain composed an impressionist landscape on the sidewalk far behind him. The hoots and whistles of Saturday children were replaced by the crescendo of droplets chasing him. He figured Laura and her dog Piper must have stayed inside at the sight of the lowering sky Lucas had ignored earlier. There was no sign of twenty-something's or the next generation strolling by with amber keepsakes of fall. If not for the sky's fading hue Lucas may have enjoyed this silent change in scenery. The only sight of concern and thought on his mind was the growing overcast. Lucas' heart urged him faster, even, than his average target heart rate of one hundred and fifty beats per minute, in tandem with the darkening clouds and their quickened pace. With decreasing sunlight, Lucas recalled his earlier panic to help increase his pace as he veered into the alley. He tried to ignore the sky, looking forward to his next ritual, debating with himself which music he should play to encourage the sun's return. Near the end of the one lane corridor, his mind stopped mid-retort, seeing the shape of his fear in the shade of trees, silhouetted by streetlights. He then screamed aloud at the sight of darkness sitting on the lowest branches, flown in on the backs of crows.

Lucas ran on the border of every shadow, dodged each shady patch of ground as if it were a chasm to some mysterious place. He had not run so fast in years. After what Lucas considered to be the longest final stretch he had run on this particular route, he reached the door. Lucas juggled his keys, shaking from a holistic exhaustion. Barging inside the small bungalow, Lucas flipped on every switch, plugged in every auxiliary cord and turned each knob until his home was sterilized with light. Lucas hurried into the bathroom and barricaded himself further from the smothering clouds outside. He rushed to the sink, gargling mantras while trying to rinse the fear from

his face. With the sweat cleared away, he tried breathing deeply again. He gazed at his panting nostrils in the mirror. With the lights at full capacity, Lucas could only vaguely make out their pulse. Lucas preemptively removed his clothes for an after-run shower then sat down on the toilet where he continued to relax. He considered well-functioning bowels the cornerstone in a healthy body and he knew apples to be a building block for healthy movements; one of the best laxatives. The burden lifted from his system proved that the morning's delicacy was indeed the culprit of his initially sluggish run. Nude and nearly emptied, Lucas began to feel a fullness of calm throughout his body. His luminary masterpiece made the encroaching storm's pensive stirrings more bearable as he sat, feeling held by the light. He had only spent minutes embracing this sense of ease when a foundation jarring smack of thunder shook the walls and sentenced him into complete darkness. Lucas' fatigued lungs released a muted cry lost inside the darkened emptiness of his unlit home, silenced by the whipping storm.

"Bright, bright again, it will be bright again." After rocking blindly through his elimination ritual while repeating this mantra, Lucas attempted to leave the toilet and retrieve the room's backup lighting. His legs pushed but his hands remained stringently adhered to the sides. After several tries, Lucas flung himself forward and grabbed the metal towel rack affixed barely a foot beyond his initial reach. He slid along the horizontal bar, feeling his way towards the cabinet on the far side of the room. Trembling, his right hand searched along the now indiscernible pastoral patterned wallpaper as he reached the limits of his crutch. His left hand remained steadfast on the end of the bar until his quivering legs made their first steps without help. "Bright again, again, bright." Jumbled, fear abating mantras became less coherent as the seizing pain from Lucas' run began to radiate through his thigh while crossing the chasm between stabilizing securities. Clattering teeth made the vague words even less decipherable than usual as Lucas lunged for the other wall. Each area of his home had a place for either flashlights or candles. The windowless bathroom had both. Their storage place was stocked with more candles than any other of the rooms. He flung open the cabinet door, slamming the corner into his exposed and already battered thigh. In relief and discomfort, Lucas held his breath as the flashlight jostled around in his hands like a boat on tumultuous seas. He turned it on as if he had finally reached some weapon in the ultimate battle for his life, and then exhaled.

The thunder had rolled further east but the rain remained, incessantly tapping on the roof of the tiny bungalow. Guided by his flashlight, Lucas shuffled across the bathroom floor, timidly delivering candles along the way. Some were scented, cinnamon or pomegranate, others were odorless beeswax. They ranged in size from tea light miniatures to foot long pillars. Lucas lit them on any available surface: the back of the toilet, the sink counter, even peeled the curtain back and lit some inside the shower.

In the whipping candle light, Lucas braced the sink counter and questioned his exhausted reflection. His body's pain shone through the contortion of fear and embarrassment on his nearly unrecognizable face. Without the vanity lights, Lucas could see more of the contours in his expression. He could see the wear of age and fear that no ritual could abate. He placed the flashlight down on the counter so it pointed up, as if he were telling a ghost story. He raised both hands and stroked the bags under his eyes then felt the lines at their perimeter. He noticed the brown tint in his eye had darkened over the years, while his hairs conversely grayed. Lost somewhere between wonder and confusion, Lucas lowered his right hand to pick-up the flashlight as his left raised to run exacerbated tips through his aging hair. Fatigued by the day's events, Lucas turned around reactively at the surprise of his shadow waving behind him.

He brandished the flashlight in defense during his abrupt reversal. Suddenly Lucas screamed pain towards the phantom intruder as his worn leg muscle tore in response to the rapid pivot. Lucas spun back around to the mirror as his shadow disappeared and he spiraled towards the ground. Even in the falling chaos, Lucas realized what had startled him, having witnessed the darkness of his very fears materialize in his own image. Lucas' head bowed towards the toilet, redirecting after his left temple bounced off its porcelain edge. Lying on the ground, Lucas' eyes slowly blinked close as the small flames of votive candles extinguished first, soon followed by the taller pillars. In the race towards the ground, the flashlight had landed first, flickering but not breaking, leaving only the intermittent flashes of battery powered luminescence to light the room.

In the Wind
by yesho atil

Who ever really knows
Which one of our freedoms is deeper?

When the wind fills the purdah
Like some memory full of possibility of reoccurrence.

Such a woman looks capable of buoyancy,
Feels possibility of flight soaring.

I watch the three move in complete black purdah
Walking quick step

Just beneath the cherry trees,
Blooms swirling in the wind.

It is the mist of perfect Spring fragrant all around,
One releases a young woman's selfless laugh.

In absence of other detail, the sound pulls me forward and
I imagine her tight white throat throbbing with joy.

They brush cherry blossoms of their dark habits and proceed
quickly ahead across Summer
Like black holes gaping for fresh air.

San Francisco
by rian wetter

You found me broken,

A dharma bum in rags.

In my eyes you saw

A buried light.

Bright vision,

Love to give.

With gentle touch,

The fog nursed my wounds.

Psychedelic ghosts

Danced me up and down the street.

We married our Mother,

And gave birth to the sea.

The End of Faith
by seth grube

Feel it abandon its last bastion,
shrinking,
the panoply splintered--

something fleeing,
vulnerable,
lost in medial grey
its trail pure ignition.

What deeds amongst the crestfallen
will lift the stunted calling
from tabetic breasts,

and with hope's scrip
concealing the bright carol,

who will pardon the wizened courier
slipping with the dispatch

into booming madness.

The State in This State of Humanities
by jeff horner

"If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character the Philsophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things, & stand still unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again." – William Blake

I am a mediocre writer.

The first time I typed that, that first hopeful draft, it was a revelation. I felt light, unburdened, like a better writer's subtle bird metaphor taking flight across my page. It is exhilarating to stare into a mirror and speak a truth you've long ignored. "I am a mediocre writer." Tympani roll. Bird metaphors sing.

But only revision can reveal the true power hidden in a piece, and these drafts marched monotonously across Word files, and each successive "mediocre" became a heavier, flightless thing. An editor plucked a feather here. A friend's comment chipped a beak there. A sentence dulled that once had a tropical luster. The Dodo sits placidly, waiting to be murdered.

It is the process that reveals the truth. It is the work that underlines my point: I am a mediocre writer -
I. Because:

a. I am a bird,
b. A bird metaphor about burdens lifted.
c. I am a sentence that begins with "I am" and ends with a bird metaphor.
d. I am repetition.
e. I repeat, I am repetition for its own sake.
f. I am Marxist criticism on the cheap.
g. I am first person and postmodern,
h. At least, I think.
i. Therefore, I am a muddled image of an ill-formed character driven by clichéd, plot-driven bird metaphors.
j. I am a break in form with little reason.
k. I am a jarring transition.

Powerful, Illuminating Anecdote

A musician friend and I once attended an open mic night. Beer bottles soon cluttered our table, and while we tried to be caring – present – for every amateur singer/songwriter, we could no longer hide our giggling contempt for each vacuous lyric and mangled chord left hanging, embarrassed, in the bird-less air. We snuck out the side door halfway through the evening.

Why, we asked. Why put yourselves out there when the world is so obviously begging you to stop? An idea struck us: a documentary about bad artists, their work, and the people who still love them! There could be a root to the want to express yourself, even if that expression is ineffective and off-key. We quickened our pace, cutting scenes in the air with our hands. We discussed solemnly the affectionate respect and honesty we'd offer each participant. We considered the talents of our artistic friends. Who would shoot the thing? Direct? How would we produce it? It was a new project, and while we were both completely inexperienced in documentary work, we had confidence in our creative eye. Arrogance would be our patron.

A few steps later, another less positive thought occured to me: "What if someone else has this same idea right now? And what if we're the subject? What if the work we cultivate is someone else's joke? What if we're caught in some recursive, self-serving cycle of bad, pointless art?"

The silence weighed heavy like a two-ton bird metaphor. At the time, I was a cook in a pizza joint, writing obsessively aware flash fiction about my morning jog. He worked odd jobs to make money and played in local cover bands. Who were we to judge? Who were we to assume we were above judgment?

We parted ways, never discussing the idea again. He worked on his craft, embracing the loneliness and monotony. He now tours the country – a one-person band, *The Saturday Giant*. He's well worth your time.

I, however, talk loudly about craft over my favorite TV shows. I stare forlornly at sentences I once held dear. I stick my nose up at your favorite authors, I make fun of the last Harry Potter, while allowing story ideas to fester that sprung me out of bed late at night to capture their brilliance – bird metaphors hidden in the middle of forgotten notepads. It is the process that reveals the truth and I am a mediocre writer,

II. But I still write because:

a. I dream of seeing my name in *New Yorker* font.
b. I wonder if bestsellers lists will still exist if and when I actually finish a book.
c. I hate feeling like a liar when I tell attractive people at bars, "Me?" sips beer, "Oh, I write."

And – oh! – there, in the process, in that last bit, in my reveling in my shallowness, is that deeper truth I strive for: I write because of the want for empathy. I write to be understood and to understand. Every expression I refine, every keystroke I erase and type again, brings me closer to you. Every effort you make to appreciate this sentence does the same. Practicing effective communication with each other through every medium now imaginable directs us towards a future enlightenment. Your cat videos on Facebook, your nervous email to your boss, your shared smile with a stranger, your formal essay analyzing the women of Beowulf, your dashed-off text to a loved one is offered hoping a mutual understanding will be shared.

And how we write, how we practice it, is the ultimate refining of this kind of empathy. Writing isn't the final product laid to rest in a self-addressed manila envelope. Writing is two parts sweating and one part word choice, pleading with your brain for that powerful verb that conjures up the proper image in your reader. It really is the journey more than the destination, the means not the end, and the thousand other platitudes that become unsettling when they border on accuracy.
The more we consider this, the more our scientists and engineers and politicians take time to evaluate the messages they send and receive, the nearer we all step towards those giant, patchouli-smelling, Ashevillian ideals of – tympani roll – peace and equality and fairness.
I hear you sighing. I hear the state sighing. We're told to sigh now. As Humanities programs are defunded across North Carolina, we're told more and more there's no use for these kinds of abstractions. Literary analysis accomplishes no real work. Philosophy is just an excuse to publish more papers about philosophy – a never-ending, self-fueling machine: the ouroboros of Academia.

III.But:

a. The scientist who can't accurately express her work to the world diminishes the value of it.
b. The engineer building a bridge who can't empathize with her staff becomes a metaphor about bridges collapsing.
c. The lawyer who ignores history is doomed to repeat it in every courtroom.
d. The general, the politician, even the brewer who dis misses philosophy ignores the very answers their fields aim to question.
e. The writer who relies on lists exposes his inherent laziness.

If you doubt me, if you cringe at my bleeding heart ideology, consider the moments in your life when your message was misconstrued. Feel that frustration again. Feel how utterly robbed of a sense of self and place you were. Where could you possibly belong in a society so willing to ignore you and your deeper truths?

"Nobody understands me!" we've all cried into our pillows.

"Try again," our pillows whispered back. "Try better." I wish our pillows spoke louder. They are all as wise as bird metaphors. They understand the Humanities are the bridge between us and the natural world we aim to discover; standing in the middle, that place one might jump from, we find ourselves learning about those bits we can't quite quantify yet. Maybe we'll be able to someday. Maybe then, art will die. Or maybe it will rise again like a Phoenix of the New Questions Left Unanswered. I really don't know. I'm just a regular bird. I do know that my name is Jeff and, at least for now, I am a mediocre writer. But, I aspire to be better. It's in the aspiration that I embrace my humanity.

And it's in a conclusion where a smart writer breaks free from his tired, self-serving gimmick and avoids being overly sentimental and repetitive:

IV.In powerful, illuminating conclusion:

a. We are all kind and empathetic bird metaphors.
b. We are all starring in documentaries making fun of us.
c. We are all manila envelopes addressed to everyone.
d. We are all wise pillows unafraid to speak up.
e. We can all be silly and concise, casual and formal,
f. And we can all embrace the loneliness and monotony a truly authentic moment entails,
g. Because magic is often buried in unexpected places,
h. And it's the digging that matters most.
i. And maybe this is the sentence,
j. The one where I communicate something so precisely, so brilliantly and beautifully, so filled with flappy metaphors of perfect pitch, that you, kind reader, sincerely understand my message, and we both rise from the ashes together and fly to Humanities Heaven, where Plato shows us around the lobby, and Tennyson takes our dinner reservations, and the pool is never too chlorinated.

k. If not, try this one.

On the Importance of Stories
by barbie byrd

Our lives are inundated with narrative from our earliest childhood memories: fairy tales, picture books, nursery rhymes. At the most basic, we create a narrative for ourselves; plot points that move the stories of our lives, conflict and dénouement, action and romance. We seek out other stories that intrigue us, dialogue and setting that enhance our own. Some of us, perhaps the luckiest among us, have a plethora of stories swirling around our heads.

I am viciously envious of those people.

So, I read. As a child, I read voraciously and with an appetite for the new and the unusual. I cut my teeth on tales of dragons and found my personal monsters easier to slay. I followed characters through alien worlds, dystopian futures, epic adventures and then found the navigation of my daily routine was blissfully simple. Reading for me has never been about escape. It is about context.

Stories have probably saved my life in dozens of ways. I have learned that villains don't always have brooding eyes or wear black hats and that often the hero can be fragile and unsure. I know, from stories, that happy endings are rare, but that life has a certain symmetry that is just as satisfying. I understand that I can be more, be better, try harder. I also know when to walk away. I know that this is full of cliché, but so is reality.

I am most assuredly not a writer. I don't have fiction flying in my brain, to be butterfly-netted and pinned to the page, but I am a reader. I know the value and the power of stories. I know they resonate through minds, generations, cultures, and centuries. Other people's stories rattle around in my head, teaching me lessons and keeping me awake at night.

Never mind if I lose a little sleep.

"Artists use lies to tell the truth. Yes, I created a lie. But because you believed it, you found something true about yourself."
—Alan Moore

contributors

London Atil:
London is a nineteen-year-old psychology student from Istanbul, Turkey. He enjoys doing overtly middle-eastern activities in Asheville "to bring some culture." He also loves to write in the third person.

Yesho Atil:
Yesho teaches English and Creative Writing at A-BTech.

Barbie Byrd:
Barbie wants you to Google her. Google her good.

Forest Beaudet:
Forest has been writing since he was seven and decided he'd rather write about the River Dance than see it. He spends most of his time hiking, writing papers, and generally just pretending he's slightly cooler than he is.

Markia C. Brooks:
Markia will soon complete her Associate of Arts degree at A-B Tech, and then go on to attend U.N.C.A., where she will attain a B.A. in creative writing. She writes poetry, short fiction, and lives with a black cat named Clyde.

Jennifer Lynn Browning:
Jennifer has taught English at Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College since 2000. She is an Asheville native who enjoys sharing stories about her hometown through her writing, scrapbooking, and photography.

Adam Carnes:
Adam is continuing to focus his energies to the improvement of communication in modern healthcare environments. However, the topic of late is, "Blah. Blah. Blah." So, he has begun refocusing the manner of communication with his love of music and experimentation of sound. Luckily, poetry is similar in art and fashion, so he still plucks along.

Nez Covington:
Nez is an 18 year old who is in her final semester here at AB-Tech. She has a great love of writing, and wants to thank Ms.Yesho Atil and Mr. Erik Moellering for their inspiring classes. Nez is also the lead vocalist and electric violinist in a local indie rock band, an artist and an aspiring linguist and world traveler, and would like to one day become a theoretical physics/modern science popularizer.

David M. Einzig:
David is a songwriter and guitarist who developed in New Orleans, Louisiana. He began drawing in his early teens after heavy exposure to artists like M.C. Escher, Pablo Picasso, Vincent Van Gogh, and Salvador Dali. David has traveled extensively throughout four of the seven continents in the world and has stumbled upon the concept that beauty is truly in the eye of the beholder.

Amie Estes:
Amie has accepted her fate as an art student who isn't actually very good at most forms of art, so she sticks to photography, as well as dabbling in acting and modeling. She plans to eventually become a children's librarian, but for now she spends most of her time reading, drinking excessive amounts of coffee, and just sort of wandering around taking pictures of things.

Seth Grube:
Seth grew up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and wandered extensively until settling with his family outside of Asheville, North Carolina. His desire to write and explore life through poetic endeavors spurred his abandonment as a U.S. Navy Seal. He now lives in a cottage surrounded by National Forest where he enjoys a simpler life of scything fields, gardening, building, and taking long aimless walks. He believes the poet is essential as a guiding light in a world dwindling from a scarcity of wonder.

Abigail Hickman:
Abigail is passionate about the language, reading criminal court transcripts, and discovering the perfect popcorn to butter to salt ratio. Her biggest fear is for her manuscripts to be discovered in a closet ripped to morose confetti by the bear who successfully attacked and killed her despite her frantic attempts to spray her ever-ready bear mace into its murderous beady eyes.

Jeff Horner:
Jeff is watching you read this.

contributors

Joseph Jamison:
Joseph is in his second and final year at A-B Tech. He will be graduating this spring with an AA degree then transfer to Western Carolina University where he plans to study entrepreneurship. His hope for this degree is to write freely, self-publish and open a jazz club after his big break. When not slaving away at the keyboard, Joseph spends his free time traipsing about the Blue Ridge Mountains and/or enjoying one of WNC's many craft brews.

Stephanie Johnson:
Stephanie began teaching for the Human Resources Development program at A-B Tech in 2008. She currently facilitates resume writing and job readiness workshops at Goodwill Industries. She also taught computer classes and re-entry curriculum at Swannanoa Correctional Center for Women. She is a devout writer of poetry and enjoys performing spoken word.

Mark Klepac:
Mark Klepac took this shot one day while relaxing in the courtyard.
Robert Franklin was a regular at a coffee shop/homeless aid organization that he worked with while living in Houston, TX. Robert provided countless moments of deep laughter and stimulating conversation. He was a very skilled artist and somewhat of a local legend in the Montrose area of Houston.

Heidi Kouri:
Heidi is an urban homesteader and herbalist living in West Asheville. She is currently working towards her Bachelor's Degree in Nursing. When she's not too busy doing homework, Heidi can be found tending her garden or caring for her chickens and angora rabbits.

Grey Wolfe LaJoie:
Grey gives no interviews, signs no autographs. Your money is sticky. I pretend to play with legos at his feet, but really I watch him. He sits at his typewriter, ticking away. I'm trying to figure out what it is he does. "Quiet!" he says sometimes. Once, he showed me how the typewriter worked. Each letter slaps onto the paper. It can be heard throughout the house. Tick, tick, tick.

Joanna Maldonado:
Joanna was born and raised in Schweinfurt, Germany and moved to Asheville in 2011. During the second semester at A-BTech, she rediscovered her passion for art in a drawing class. Most of her drawings and paintings show her fascination for transparency and reflection.

Forrest McDonald:
Forrest was born in Asheville and will be graduating from A-B Tech in the 2014 fall semester. Being very passionate, Forrest express what he feel through various mediums. He believes strong issues that may seem worlds away can be understood by anyone if they are shown in the correct medium and with passionate delivery.

Meru:
Meru loves to live, experience, and capture moments. Her goal, as an artist, is to help people encounter beauty. "Type A" has always spoken to her, on an elemental level. Like true art, it makes her feel something deeper than words.

Porscha Orndorf:
Porscha grew up in a trailer park in the Plateau (pronounced Plat-aww), North Carolina. You won't find it, or the rest of her story, on any map. She lives in West Asheville with her spouse, two dogs, four cats, and all the birds, squirrels, and flying squirrels who dare to cross her back porch. She enjoys quilting, painting, and reading anything with words. Occasionally, she writes something down. On rare occasions, other people read it.

Caroline Padgett:
Caroline recently returned to school after a 15 year break to study literature and writing. She currently works in the alternative health field and simultaneously loves her job and being back in the academic world. She is looking to finish her undergrad as a B.F.A. in creative writing.

Kadie Sanders:
Kadie Sanders is a visual artist pursuing the connections between artistic expression and mental health. In March 2014, with the support of A-B Tech's Student Business Incubator, Kadie moved into a studio in the Warehouse Studios in River Arts District. She is eager to greet visitors drawn to Asheville's inspiration and creativity. Edification speaks of the power to realize potential when lifted up.

contributors

Reeves Singleton:
Reeves lives on a farm, loves the arts to an almost obscene degree, and occasionally smokes a pipe whilst wistfully stroking his woefully unkempt beard. He is known for being cripplingly shy, for having the sexiest gosh darned voice you've ever heard, and for judging people entirely based on their taste in film. He is a fan of alliteration, of talking to himself in a variety of accents in a way that roughly simulates the experience of journeying through the British Isles, of pretentious independent video games that emotionally explore the fringes of human sexuality, and of being endearingly twee, but only on the inside.

Cecilia Stokes:
Cecelia has always enjoyed photography and art of any kind. It wasn't until her freshman year in high school that she realized she could participate in the beauty of creation as well. Since that realization, she always carries a camera or sketchbook with her. She doesn't have any focused goal with her artwork, but tries to share it with others whenever she gets the chance. She hopes you enjoy.

Mary Topper:
Mary is a 23 year old sophomore student at A-B Tech who grew up in western Massachusetts, experienced puberty in central Florida, and ran around New York City and New Orleans on a few occasions without understanding what cities are. She now lives in south Asheville with a black cat named Foobi, who is her best friend. The two plan to grow old together in France collecting jazz records, drinking heavily, and advocating for the advancement of bullet trains in the United States and Europe. Mary's closest human friend and lover lives in Nashville, Tennessee, and will most likely end up in France with me and the cat.

Nicholas Welch:
Nicholas is a senior at North Buncombe High School in Weaverville, North Carolina. He will be attending the University of North Carolina at Wilmington this coming fall. He is 17 years old.

Magnolia Wilson:
Magnolia is a lot like you.

Christina Wozniak:
Photography captures what is underneath the surface while giving meaning to a subject. In this piece Christina tries to bring out the extraordinary inside the unremarkable. Light and its ability to reveal what is extraordinary constantly intrigues her.

Interested in submitting your creative writing or artwork to *The Rhapsodist*?

We will begin accepting submissions for our next issue in September 2014.

Check out our *Facebook* page for details (The Rhapsodist Literary Arts Journal).

Send all queries to rhapsodistjournal@gmail.com

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cover image by Kadie Sanders

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